



Author Name: Elizabeth Fuller

University: Columbia University

Program of Study: Dr.P.H.

Abstract Title: Informing Juveniles of the Penalties for Armed Robbery: Using a Public Health Marketing Approach

Abstract: There is a pressing need to reorient the nation's consciousness of injury and violence from a focus on isolated incidents, to a focus on issues, especially prevention. Since prevention of illness and injury is the core mission of public health, the field is uniquely positioned to assist in developing, implementing and evaluating violence reduction strategies. Since the 1990s, there has been a nationwide policy shift towards transferring juveniles to criminal court, reflecting society's belief that stricter, adult sentences will prevent crime—that the sentences will act as either a specific or general deterrent to juvenile criminal activity. A crucial, yet not currently well-understood aspect of this policy is the impact of law on juvenile criminal behavior. Juveniles in Georgia charged with violent crime are automatically tried in adult court and if convicted, subject to that state's mandatory sentencing laws, which require 10-year minimum sentences for serious violent felonies. Are juveniles sentenced under the law aware of the penalties prior to arrest? If so, do they believe that the law will be applied to them? Both of these factors must exist for the law to achieve its deterrent effect. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, data were collected from 37 juveniles arrested for violent crime in Dekalb County, Georgia. Juveniles reported knowing that they could be tried as adults for the crimes of rape or murder, but none reported knowing, prior to arrest, that he could be tried as an adult for armed robbery. In addition, the arrested juveniles reported that a 10-year sentence could serve as a deterrent to armed robbery if the penalty were widely understood. The juveniles designed commercials and billboards and gave practical suggestions of how to publicize the law to their peers. The results suggest that trying juveniles as adults could serve as a deterrent; however, there is a need for increased educational campaigns, designed with direct input from the target population.